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NOTES ON THE HAYWARD-HUTCHINSON HOUSE
19 MAPLE STREET
PINE VALLEY
MILFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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APRIL 28, 2006

These notes are based on a brief inspection of the Hayward-Hutchinson House on April 28, 2006. Present during the inspection were David Palance, owner of the house; JerriAnne Boggis of the Milford Heritage Commission; Professor David H. Watters of the University of New Hampshire; and James L. Garvin, state architectural historian. The purpose of the inspection was to ascertain whether features of the standing house correlate with descriptions of the possibly fictionalized "Bellmont" homestead described by Harriet Wilson in her book, *Our Nig*, published in 1859 and reprinted in several editions in 1982, 1983, and 2004. Attributes of the "Bellmont" House, as portrayed in the book, are listed at the end of this report.

In order for the Hayward-Hutchinson House to correspond with descriptions in the book, it would have had the following attributes in and after 1831, which appears to be the date at which the narrative commences: 1. "old-fashioned," 2. "two-story," 3. "white." It would also have to possess other features or room uses and arrangements, described below.

The main portion of the Hayward-Hutchinson House is an eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century "Cape Cod" style house, two rooms deep. Most of the framing elements of the house are covered by modern finishes, but a portion of the first floor framing is exposed in the half cellar beneath the eastern room of the dwelling, and a

rafter, trenched for a purlin, is visible in the rear slope of the original roof frame in a closet in the eastern bedchamber.

These elements point to a relatively early date for the frame of the house. The first-floor frame is composed of a bridging joist ("summer beam") that runs from front sill to rear sill at the centerline of the rectangular basement area. The main beam is hewn. Framing into it at regular intervals are common joists, all sawn on a reciprocating sawmill and set into butt-cogged joints. The sills of this portion of the house are hewn. Sub-floor boards are likewise sawn on a reciprocating sawmill. The entire basement, including stone walls and the floor structure overhead, retains a coating of whitewash, indicating that the space was brightened and freshened for some use.

This type of first-floor construction is uncommon. Most eighteenth-century houses have first-floor frames composed of sleepers, or tree boles that span the interval from sill to sill and are hewn flat on top to receive the floor boarding. Without a survey of eighteenth-century houses along the Souhegan River valley, it is presently impossible to know how common or uncommon this type of carpentry may be, but it clearly derives from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century carpentry traditions.

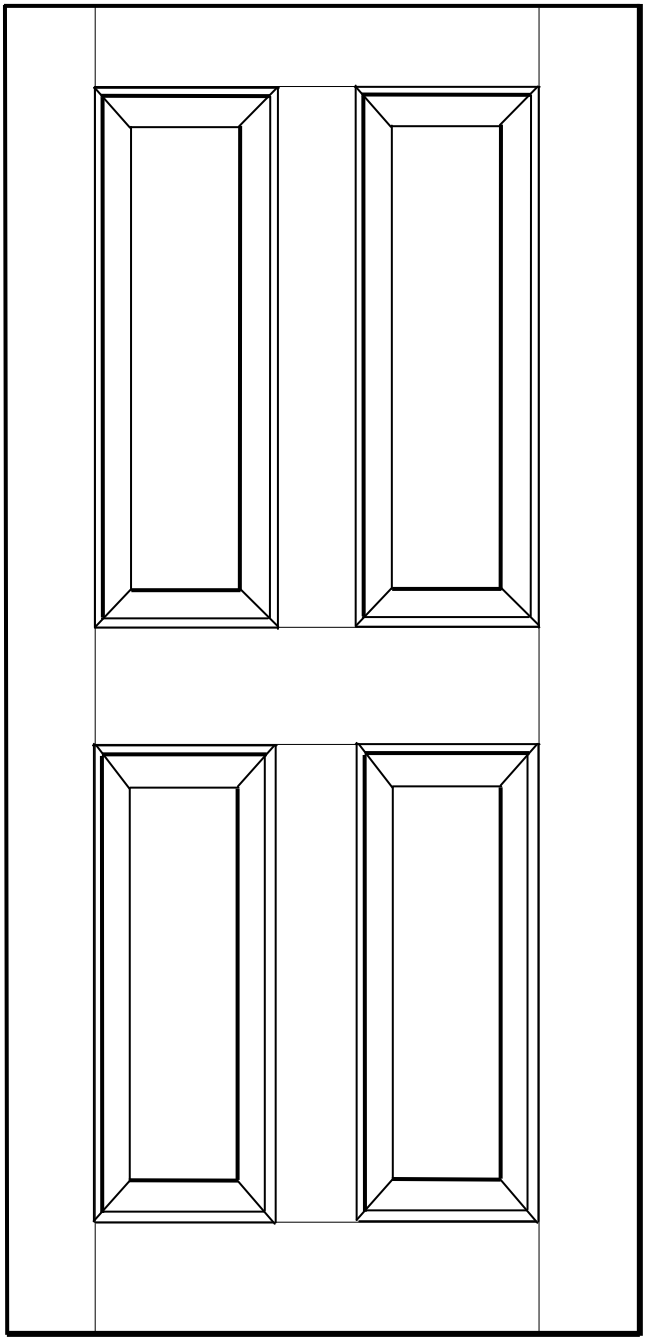
Similarly, the hewn rafters of the roof frame, as seen in the one exposed portion, are characteristic of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries.

The house has a cellar only under the eastern room. The excavated cellar extends from the eastern wall of the house to the plane defined by the eastern chimney posts. The base of the presumed central chimney (now missing) therefore falls beyond the cellar walls, and no trace of it is visible. The walls of the cellar are built of natural and split fieldstones below grade, carefully laid to a true inside face and well pointed or mortared. At and above grade, the house is underpinned by split granite slaps hammered flat on their exterior surfaces. A quick inspection did not disclose splitting marks on these underpinning stones, but it is possible in any case that the stones were added after the house was completed, presumably replacing mortared rubble cellar walls above grade.

While the interior finishes of the house were largely replaced in the late nineteenth century (see below), the house retains at least two four-panel doors with raised panels, diagnostic of a date before 1800.

Similarly, the northeast corner of the first floor, in an area now occupied by basement stairs, retains horizontal wall sheathing of the same pattern of feather-edged boards and boards with an ovolo or quarter-round molding, made with the same tools as the doors.

A diagram of the earliest types of doors found in the house is given below.



Georgian Four-Panel Door, 1710-1800

These doors, and the associated sheathing in the northeastern corner of the house, presumably represent the original pattern of the interior woodwork of the dwelling. With the exception of a few moldings, there is no clear indication of joiner's work of a later pattern throughout the house, so we may assume that the interior detailing of the dwelling retained this general pattern in and after the 1830s, the period of the story. The house

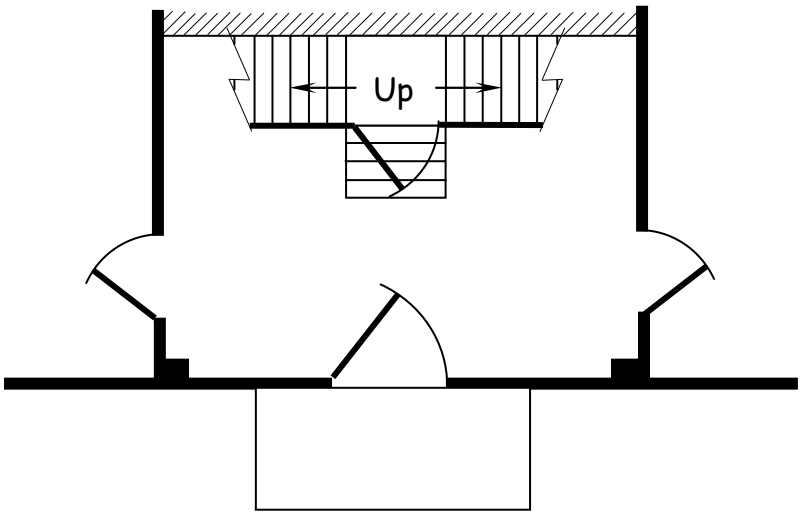
would therefore properly have been described as "old-fashioned" in the 1830s and later, especially considering the fact that the building presumably retained a central chimney with open fireplaces at this period, a time when air-tight parlor stoves and cooking ranges were becoming increasingly accepted.

Harriet Wilson also described the "Bellmont" House as two-story. This description evokes an image of a dwelling of two full stories, presumably with a full attic above the second story. The Hayward-Hutchinson House shows no indication of ever having been anything other than a two-room-deep "Cape Cod" dwelling. The lower frame appears intact, as indicated by projecting posts at the corners of the building and at the central chimney bay. The roof frame appears to be early, as indicated by the single exposed rafter.

The norm for such a center chimney "Cape Cod" house would be to have its finished rooms on the first story and an unfinished attic above. The presence of the large central chimney would normally call for a compact "triple-run" staircase in front of the chimney, immediately inside the front door. In such a house, the slope of the roof at the top of such stairs would make it difficult to provide full-height doors leading right and left into finished bedchambers on the upper level.

The stair arrangement that is sometimes encountered when access is needed to rooms on each side of a central chimney calls for a short, central run of stairs leading from the lower floor to a landing placed against the plumb front face of the central chimney, with two lateral runs of stairs, leading right and left from the landing, which ascend to the level above. Possibly such an arrangement was found in this house. Such a staircase could easily have a door at the landing at the end of the first run of stairs. This could make possible the situation described in the book: When Mrs. Bellmont heard Aunt Abby "cross the entry below, to ascend the stairs, she slipped out [of where?] and held the latch of the door which led to the upper entry."

The plan of such a staircase might look like this (not to scale):



Even though such an arrangement could have provided access to finished rooms beneath the roof of the house, the fact remains that such a building would not normally be described as a "two-story" house. While there may have been habitable rooms beneath the roof (as there are today), the description of the house as "two-story" may have been a simplification to ease the telling of what transpired in the house.

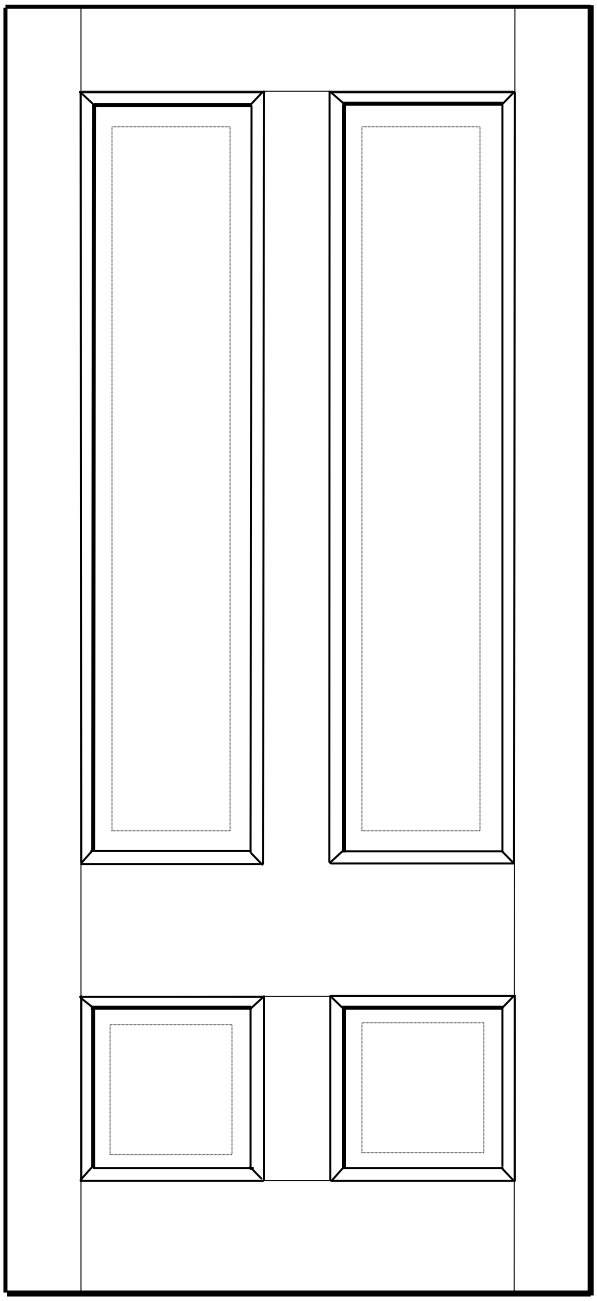
Today, the house has two front roof dormers, which together with the gable-end windows provide light and air to the two bedchambers. While the sashes in these dormers date from the late nineteenth century (see below), the detailing of the dormer cornices suggests joinery in the Greek Revival style, which would denote a date between about 1830 and about 1850. Without further investigation, we cannot know whether these dormers may date from the period of the narration in the book, or from several decades later, but it is possible that they were added by circa 1830 to give the upper chambers more light and ventilation.

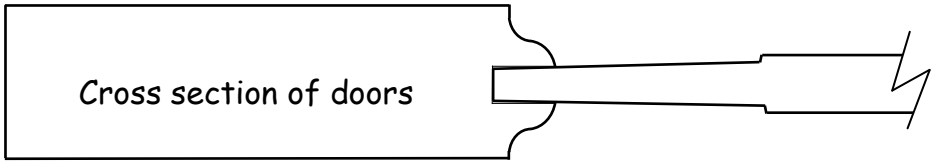
As for the house being "white" (it is described on the title page of the book as "a Two-Story White House, North"), paint evidence leaves little doubt that the building was painted white during the nineteenth century, as were most dwellings of the period. A notable complaint about dwellings of the Greek Revival era was made by the architectural theorist and horticulturist Andrew Jackson Downing in his book, *Cottage Residences* (1842): they were mostly painted "glaring" white, with bright green window blinds. This was the norm for the period. (Of course, the term "a . . .White House, North" could have been a sly reference to the race of its occupants.)

There is clear and pervasive stylistic evidence that the house was thoroughly remodeled in the late nineteenth century, probably in the 1880s or 1890s. The present front door, the newel posts and balusters of the staircase, the interior doors, and most of the window sashes in the house all bear the stylistic hallmarks of this period. The 1892 D. H. Hurd *Town and City Atlas of the State of New Hampshire* indicates a "P. Hutchinson" living in the house. According to The Harriet Wilson Project's *A Black Heritage Tour*, the property passed to Nehemiah P. and Prudence Hayward when Nehemiah Hayward, Jr., and Rebecca Hayward moved to Baltimore in 1849. Charles Hayward next acquired the property, and eventually sold it to his sister Betsy and her husband, David Hutchinson. Possibly the Hutchinsons, as new owners, remodeled the house. Knowledge of the dates of these property transactions would help to determine who carried out the late nineteenth-century remodeling.

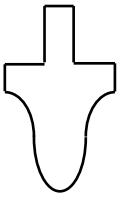
The changes that characterize this remodeling were clearly an attempt to modernize the building and make its floor plan more convenient. The central chimney was removed and its space was transformed into a wide stairhall passing through the front of the house to a large back room. A straight staircase was placed against the right-hand (east) wall of the hallway, providing convenient access to the second story. All traces of mantelpieces were removed, and new flooring was laid down. Doors of the following pattern (a standard type of the late 1800s) were placed wherever needed throughout the main house:

Four-Panel Door





New window sashes of a contemporary muntin pattern were installed throughout the house, including the dormer windows on the front slope of the roof, and for the most part remain in place:



Original Floor Plan: The floor plan of the house prior to these late nineteenth-century alterations remains somewhat unclear, as does the possible correlation between the floor plan and descriptions of the house, and rooms within it, given in *Our Nig*.

The ell that currently extends off the western gable end of the house may correspond to the place where the protagonist, when sick, "was removed to a room built out from the main building, used formerly as a workshop, where cold and rain found unobstructed access." This wing has several apparent attributes of a workshop and/or woodshed, including evidence of a former doorway near the center of its front (southern) elevation. The frame of the wing is fairly light in construction, but shows clear evidence of being well braced and staunch.

Although most of its interior surfaces are covered with plaster or modern materials, the wing appears to be of the same general age as the main house. It has a full cellar beneath it, although this space is entirely separate from the cellar beneath the eastern end of the main house. The splitting technology employed for the stones in the foundation of the wing, however, indicates that the wing (or at least its cellar) was not in this location in the earlier history of the property. A number of stones, including some near the footings of the basement walls, were split with "plugs and feathers." The use of this type of wedge, and the corresponding cylindrical holes that are made with plug drills, post-dates 1830. Thus, while the wing could have stood in its current position, connected with the main house, by the time the story's narrative is believed to commence, this appendage is older than the foundation walls upon which it stands. This is further indicated by the fact that there are two wooden sills lying on these stone walls: the lower one presumably placed as an even platform for the frame, and the upper one presumably being the original structural sill of the frame.

The protagonist's description of the house suggests that the building had a rear ell or wing at the time of her residency here, and that this wing was then used as a kitchen. The book contains several passages that give some indication of the chamber above this kitchen. The first passage records "Mrs. Bellmont's" decision that the child shall sleep in the unfinished garret of the wing:

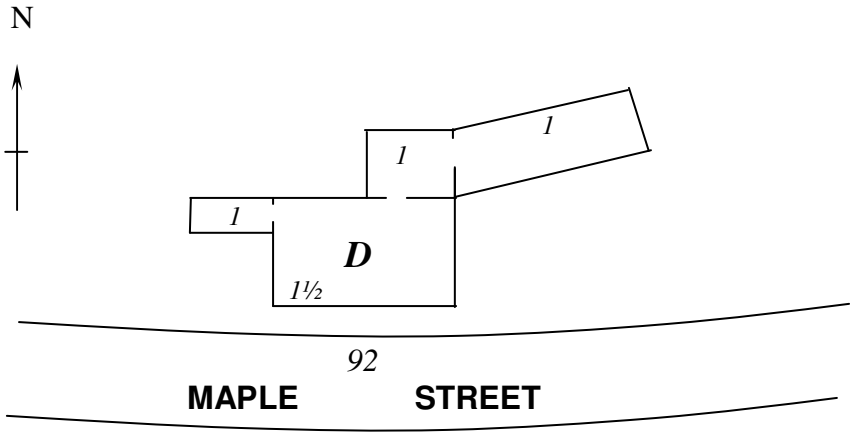
> She'll be afraid to go through that dark passage and she can't climb the ladder safely.

The second passage tells more about the route through the main chambers of the house to the garret. On her first visit to the unfinished room, the protagonist was taken by "Jack Bellmont" to the chamber. They

> ascended the stairs without any light, passing through nicely furnished rooms, which were a source of great amazement to the child. He opened the door which connected with her room by a dark, unfinished passage-way. "Don't bump your head," said Jack, and stepped before to open the door leading into her apartment,—an unfinished chamber over the kitchen, the roof slanting nearly to the floor, so that the bed could stand only in the middle of the room. A small half window furnished light and air.

This passage implies that the ell of the house was a one-story wing with low eaves. The current wing of the house is a two-story structure. Its rafters are visible above a trap door in the same closet that affords a glimpse of the original rafters of the main house. These rafters are modern, and appear to be band-sawn.

The fact that the ell on the rear of the main house was a one-story wing is confirmed by several twentieth-century maps published by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Sanborn maps for Milford were published in 1885, 1892, 1901, 1907, 1912, 1924, and 1924 (updated to 1945). Regrettably, only the last three maps include Pine Valley, the western village of Milford that abuts the manufacturing village of East Wilton. The 1912, 1924, and 1945 maps indicate the Hayward-Hutchinson House as follows (rectified to indicate north as shown):

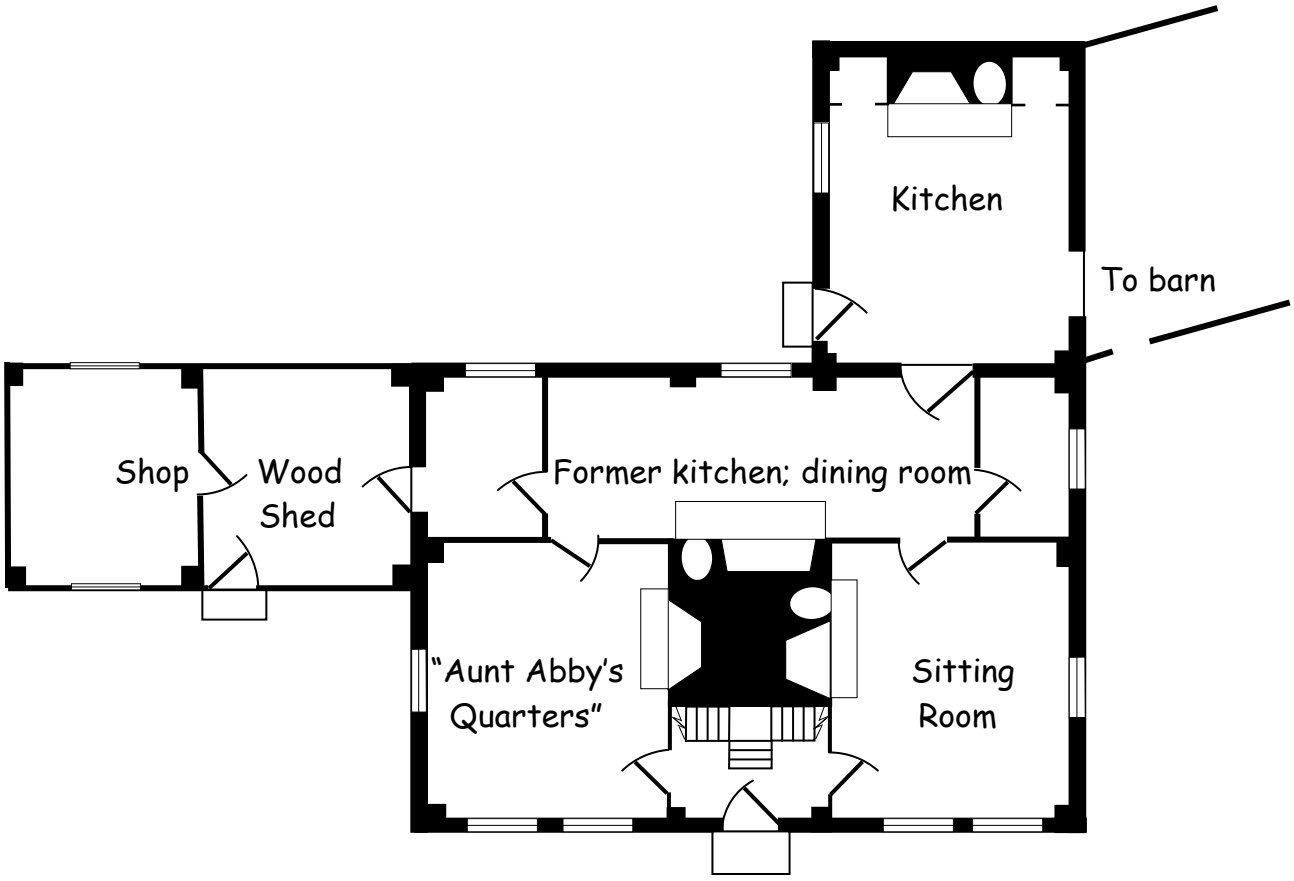


On these maps, "*D*" indicates "Dwelling." The numerals on the plan indicate story heights of the various building components. "92" indicates a former street address. In the absence of other documentation, these Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps thus seem to indicate that the second story of the rear ell was added sometime after 1945.

As shown in the notes below, there are several references in the book that provide a few clues to the disposition of rooms in the house before its remodeling in the late 1800s. Indeed, the general room layout at that time would probably not have differed much from the present plan, except for the presence of the large central chimney and its fireplaces, creating a much more constrained entry inside the front door.

References speak of a "sitting room," a "dining room," and "Aunt Abby's own quarters" or her "room," part of an undivided half of the house that in reality belonged to Sally Hayward Blanchard. In a house that had not been officially divided by probate court, the disposition of space in the undivided house could be made as the family might decide among themselves. But it would be logical to assume that a first-floor room and the chamber above it might be allocated to a widow who owned half of the property—together with the use, in common, of other rooms like the "dining room," the kitchen, the woodshed, and other facilities such as wells, privies, etc.

Based both on references in the book and on the common first floor plan for two-room-deep houses of the late eighteenth century (whether two full stories or "Cape Cod" houses), the floor plan of the Hayward House during the 1830s might be conjectured to have resembled the following drawing. Only physical investigation of the house will ultimately reveal the actual details of the plan.



BUILDING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REFERENCES, HARRIET WILSON,

OUR NIG (1859; new edition, Penguin Books, 2004)

If the author was born on March 15, 1825, then the story begins in 1831, when she was six years old. If the house was owned by brother and sister Nehemiah Hayward and Sally Hayward Blanchard, it would have been built before 1800 (see below).

p. 13 "Two miles beyond [the village] lived the Bellmonts, in a large, old-fashioned, two-story house, environed by fruitful acres and embellished by shrubbery and shade trees."

p. 87, n. 8 Sally Hayward Blanchard (1776-1859), widow, purchased 59 acres (an undivided half of 118 acres) at auction for $700 (Hillsborough Deeds, 145:493; November 10, 1825; recorded November 15, 1825). Brother Nehemiah Hayward, Jr. (1778-1849), held the other undivided half (Hillsborough Deeds, 49:47; January 4, 1800).

p. 16 She shall sleep in an ell chamber; "She'll be afraid to go through that dark passage and she can't climb the ladder safely."

p. 17 Going to the ell chamber, Jack went to the kitchen, took Frado by the hand, [then returned and because it was not quite dark,] "ascended the stairs without any light, passing through nicely furnished rooms, which were a source of great amazement to the child. He opened the door which connected with her room by a dark, unfinished passage-way. 'Don't bump your head,' said Jack, and stepped before to open the door leading into her apartment,—an unfinished chamber over the kitchen, the roof slanting nearly to the floor, so that the bed could stand only in the middle of the room. A small half window furnished light and air."

p. 19 On the opening day of school, Frado walked to school. There was, on their way home, "a field intersected by a stream over which a single plank was placed for crossing."

p. 20 "Shut her up in a dark room [not her room] without any supper."

p. 27 "the dining room"

p. 28 "sitting room"

p. 31 Sheep pasture "bounded on three sides by a wide stream which flowed on one side at the base of precipitous banks."

p. 36 "found her on the roof of the barn"

p. 37 Aunt Abby's "own quarters," "room." Aunt Abby's [room]—undivided half of the house.

p. 43 James, who moved back to the house when sick, also had a room—also had a wife and child with him.

p. 51 Aunt Abby "returned slowly to her own room."

p. 66 "[Sick,] she was removed to a room built out from the main building, used formerly as a workshop, where cold and rain found unobstructed access. . . . Aunt Abby made her frequent visits, and at last had her removed to her own apartment . . ."

There are also references to the kitchen "hearth," and to warming Frado "by the kitchen fire," apparently indicating open fireplaces even in the 1830s, and thus denoting an older house with fireplaces.